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ABSTRACT

The paper describes a federally funded research project which employs the "trainer of trainers" model with parents and teachers of handicapped children. The project has four major objectives: to train special educators in parent intervention techniques; to recruit and train parents as trainers of other parents; to establish a parent resource center, and to disseminate to parents involvement information. Project components include: a needs assessment for teachers and parents in the community; a teacher training program in home intervention and the small group process; a home based parent training program in behavioral techniques; and a school based parent support group program and a Parent Advisory Council. Literature relating to the need to train parents and to train teachers in parent intervention techniques is reviewed. Also considered are the effectiveness of parent training to change behaviors, the ecological approach to parent intervention, various models of parent involvement, and problems in parent training. The literature indicates that a collaborative effort by individuals in the home, school, and community can effect the best possible gains for handicapped children. (SW)

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TRAINING PARENTS OF HANDICAPPED YOUNGSTERS UTILIZING A 'TRAINER OF TRAINERS' MODEL: A RESEARCH PROJECT AND ITS THEORETICAL DETERMINANTS

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A major problem facing our schools and communities today is the extent to which parents af handicapped youngsters lack the necessary skills or coping behaviors to effectively assist their youngsters in the day to day activities of growing up.

The report of the Foundation for Child Development's National Survey of Children concludes that one-third of the 125 million children in America with an emotional, behavioral, mental, or learning problem serious enough for parents to seek outside help did not receive any counseling or care (APA Moniter, 1977). Other surveys indicate that between one-quarter & one-third of all American children grow up in conditions of poverty, that significantly damage their development (All Our Children, 1977). Such children with developmental delays and handicapping conditions can be expected to display behaviors in school which include acting-out; aggression, withdrawal; poorly developed impulse control; low self-esteem; deficits in relationships; communication skills; personal autonomy skills; and learning disabilities.

Numerous contributing factors have been blamed for the incidence of handicapping conditions in youngsters including biophysical disorders, inadequate nuturing or childrearing practices, poor educational systems, and unhealthy or

impoverished community settings (Apter, 1981). In addition to these possible causes, handicapped children frequently experience upsets in the family system (Whittaker, 1975).

Based on this evidence, there is a strong need for special educators and other professionals to develop the skills and knowledge required to interact constructively and effectively with families of handicapped children. According to Swap (1978) and Bronfenbrenner (1977) understanding the complex relations between the developing person and environment in an immediate setting containing that person (i.e. home, school, etc.), is critical to changing human behavior. Once those skills have been developed, teachers can engage in parent intervention, both in home settings and in small parent group settings. Moreover, by employing a "trainer of trainers model" (referred to in the literature as "turnkey of trainers of other parents" by Hall, Grinstead, Collier and Hall, 1980) teachers can impact significantly on parent-parent, parent-child, parent-school, and parent-community relationships. According to Halvorsen (1982) "a model which recruits parents to advocate for, train support and in turn recruit other parents, is the only model which will ensure long term parent investment in both the educational process and the future of their severely handiccapped children" (p.242)

Given these concerns, a federally funded training project for parents and teachers of handicapped children was initiated in June 1983 at Herbert H. Lehman College, CUNY, in cooperation with Community School District 10, Bronx, by Dr. Susan Polirstok and Dr. Brian Hurwitz. This project has four major objectives: (1) to train special educators in parent intervention techniques; (2) to recruit and train parents to serve as trainers of other parents; (3) to establish a parent resource center; and (4) to disseminate parent involvement information and the notion of the "trainer of trainers model."

This project, now completing Year One of a three year grant, has trained teachers in home intervention techniques and in the design of in-school parent training workshops. These school-based parent training workshops have been conducted by our specially trained project teachers in cooperation with selected schools within Community School District 10. Parents of handicapped youngsters participating in these workshops have been trained to recruit other parents and to conduct workshops of a similar nature. Over sixty parents have been trained during this Year One cycle.

This project employs the "trainer of trainers model" which, in this instance, serves to insure the continuation of future parent training activities after the funding period. An ecological framework has been used in designing this project. This framework posits that a change in one "system surrounding the child, parent, teacher, will effect changes in other systems surrounding them." Hence training components

have been developed at the University, school, home, and community levels, in an attempt to bring a greater degree of harmony between these environments or systems both for an individual handicapped youngster and his/her family, as well as for parent, teacher and community groups on a larger organizational scale. Briefly, the Parent Training Project has the following components: a needs assessment for teachers and parents in the community; a teacher training program in home intervention and a small group process; a home-based parent training program in behavioral techniques, a school-based parent support group program, and a Parent Advisory Council. This council monitors project activities, and is in the process of acquiring the necessary skills to be able to completely direct all parent training in the target area after the funding period has been completed.

The project encourages parent-school-community partnerships by involving parents, teacher and university personnel in the delivering of home-based services to parents and their handicapped youngsters. Using a "trainer of trainers" model, parents will be able to further reach out in the community to other parents who need assistance. Since all project activities and parent meetings are held in a community-based social service agency, members of the partnership come together with a true feeling of community cooperation. In addition, a permanent parent resource center has been established at Public School 86, adjacent to Lehman College for use by parents, teachers and college students. By establishing

this resource center in a local community school building, the project seeks to further enhance its working relationship with the community.

The roots and philosophy of this project can be directly traced to the issues discussed in the literature regarding the training of parents to effect change in their handicapped youngsters. A comprehensive review of literature is presented to highlight the major issues a successful parent training project must address.

The Need to Train Parents

The need to train parents of handicapped youngsters has been documented extensively in the literature (Patterson, Ray & Shaw, 1969; Patterson, 1973; Fodor, 1973; Heifetz, 1974). Parents make the difference in a youngster's success in school and in later life. Parent acceptance and skills in dealing with a youngster's handicap will set the stage for how the youngster will relate to significant others in the environment, including teachers, peers, and siblings. Having a handicapped youngster for most parents is a traumatic event in life, producing initially an array of reactions which may include fear, anger, rejection, and total helplessness (Baum, 1962; Kanner 1953; Love, 1970). Often anger and avoidance characterize the relationship between parents of handicapped youngsters and the schools, who seek to involve parents in their youngster' educations as mandated by PL 94-142.

Assisting parents in learning to accept their handicapped youngsters and providing parents with the necessary skills to deal effectively with their youngsters are important steps in lessening the trauma these parents experience.

Parent training has been offered as a promising support service for meeting the needs of a sizeable handicapped population (Fodor, 1973; Heifetz, 1974). After Williams' (1959) pioneer experiment in which a mother eliminated her child's bedtime tantrums through contingent ignoring, research in the area of parent training proliferated (O'Dell, 1974).

The rationale for training parents in techniques for the purpose of changing their children's maladaptive behaviors evolved from the assumption that many such behaviors are a function, or partly a function, of the social stimuli within the child's immediate environment (Patterson, Ray, & Shaw, 1969). Therefore, it followed that the most effective and efficient means of changing children's behavior would be to alter the reinforcement contingencies which maintain it (Patterson et al., 1969; Zeilberger, Sampen, & Sloan, 1968). Inasmuch as parents are conspicuous social stimuli in the child's environment and are assumed to control and maintain behavior (Bijou, 1965; O'Leary, O'Leary, & Becker, 1967;

Patterson, Cobb, & Ray, 1973), it has been proposed that parents should be the primary targets of intervention programs (Patterson, 1973; Patterson et al., 1973).

Gelfand and Hartmann (1968) in a section of their extensive review of the literature on the general applicability of behavior therapy to child disorders, cite research in which parents were taught to reduce problem behaviors of their children. These authors state that teaching parents to modify their child-rearing practices might not only prove to be more effective than laboratory or clinic treatment with a therapist, but might also serve as a preventive measure for future problem behaviors. Others who have surveyed the research in the area of parent training (Berkowitz & Graziano, 1971; Johnson & Katz, 1973; O'Dell, 1974; Reisinger, Ora, & Fragia, 1976) attest to the efficacy and viability of training parents as change agents for their children's behavior.

Behaviors Changed Through Parent Training

Parents who have been trained successfully to modify the behaviors of children who represent some of the major areas of exceptionality. These areas include the mentally retarded (Arnold, Sturgis, & Forehand, 1977; Rose, 1974; Tavormina, 1975);

the autistic (Hamblin, Buckholdt, Ferritor, Kozloff, & Blackwell, 1971; Moore & Bailey, 1973; Nordquist & Wahler, 1973; Risley & Wolf, 1955; Wetzel, Baker, Roney, & Martin, 1966); the emotionally disturbed/behaviorally disordered (Gardner, Pearson, Bercovici, & Bricker, 1968; Goodman, 1975; Johnson & Brown, 1969; Mathis, 1971; Rinn, Vernon & Wise, 1975; and the deaf (Forehand, Cheney, & Yoder, 1974). Moreover, parents have demonstrated their effectiveness in decreasing a wide variety of child behavior problems subsequent to training in applying the principles of reinforcement, successive approximation, modeling, and punishment. The various techniques for implementing these principles have been used for speech problems (Arnold et al., 1977; Mathis, 1971; Nordquist & Wahler, 1973; Rickert & Mundy, 1965; Risley & Wolf, 1955); self-destructive behaviors (Allen & Harris, 1966); asthmatic attacks (Neisworth, 1972); psychogenic seizures (Gardner, 1967); school phobia (Ayllon, Smith, & Rogers, 1970; Cooper, 1973; Tahmisian & McReynolds, 1971); insomnia (Bergman, 1976); bowel training (Barrett, 1969); and oppositional behaviors (Baer, Rowbury, Baer, Herbert, Clark, & Nelson, 1976; Bernal, 1959; Bernal, Duryee, Pruett, & Burns, 1968; Forehand & King, 1977; Hawkins, Peterson, Schwied, & Bijou, 1966; O'Leary et al., 1973; Patterson & Brodsky, 1966;

Russo, 1964; Shah, 1969; Straughan, 1964; Wahler, 1969, Winkel, Peterson, & Morrison, 1971; and Zeilberger et al., 1968).

The Need to Train Teachers in Parent Intervention Techniques

Regardless of the causes which give rise to handicapping conditions, Reinert (1981) notes that much of the literature blames parents for the way their children function. Yet, according to Reinert, teachers have generally had a one-way relationship with parents of handicapped youngsters, with little sharing of ideas. However, most teachers believe that parents of handicapped youngsters should be included in educational programming and counseling efforts, and that such parents are worthy of program emphasis (Vincent, Laten, Salisbury, Brown & Baumgart, 1980).

Although the notion of teachers consulting with, and counseling parents is not new, there are few colleges engaged in teacher training which emphasize systematic parent intervention and training for teachers of handicapped youngsters. The courses that do exist are largely classroom based and do not make use of the actual home setting in which parent-child relationships can be observed in-vivo.

In a discussion of the nature of teaching and developing

training strategies for teachers, Reynolds (1980) reports that "all teachers should have skills and sensitivity for dealing with parents and siblings of handicapped students; they should have had opportunities to practice skills in this area as part of their practicum in teacher preparation" (p. 10). This emphasis on skills and sensitivity is especially critical for Special Education teachers who are faced with the difficult task of educating handicapped youngsters. This parent intervention mandated in PL94-142 is underscored in the New York State Education Department Commissioner's Regulations, Part 200.6 Continuum of Service for Handicapped Children (section (f)-Special classes, paragraph (7), effective July 1, 1982), which states: "For parents of pupils placed in special classes described in paragraph (4) (ii) and (iii) of this subdivision provisions shall be made for parent counseling or education for the purpose of enabling parents to perform appropriate follow-up intervention activities at home" (p. 21). Therefore, Special Educators must be provided with the necessary skills for interacting, successfully with parents of handicapped youngsters, and must be able to provide parents with strategies and suggestions to facilitate better parent-child relationships.

Working with families can provide professionals, especially special educators, with an understanding of family problems that can lead to broader, more effective interventions. Letulle (1979) has discussed the major changes in the treatments offered by residential centers for handicapped youngsters as a result of a reorientation to a family systems approach.

Chinn, Winn, and Walters (1978); Coletta (1977); Miller and Wilmhurst (1975); Bennett and Henson (1977); and Kroth (1975) all emphasize the need for special educators to become more involved with families. Lightfoot (1981) argues that in view of many children's failure to learn in school, professionals involved in the education of children must force themselves to take a larger view of the curriculum, and to find effective collaborative strategies for the real participation of parents and teachers. This, according to Lightfoot, means reducing criticism of parents, and attempting to involve parents actively in their childs education. Linton (1971) provides an ecological view of the educator as being one who must attempt to effect change in all aspects of the childs social system. This, according to Linton, means working directly with the child's family.

The Ecological Approach to Parent Intervention

Advocates of the ecological perspective do not propose doing away with other modes of intervention such as psychotherapy or behavioral intervention (Reinert, 1980; Rhodes, 1980), but rather believe that there is room for a variety of intervention techniques within the ecological framework.

The view of the ecological environment as consisting of various systems has been clearly outlined by Bronfenbrenner (1977) who describes "ecosystems" as being a nested arrangement of structures. This arrangement includes a microsystem which constitutes the child's immediate environment (e.g. home, school); and a mesosystem comprising the interrelations among microsystems. In terms of the handicapped youngster improvement in any part of the system can benefit the child and the entire system. Consequently, the way to help a handicapped child is not necessarily to change the child directly but to attempt to bring about change in other areas. With this in mind, interventions can focus on any system element but the goal of such efforts is not to cure a child of his problem behaviors, but to increase the concordance of the child's ecological environment. Therefore, the ecological perspective as viewed by a number of investigators allows

practitioners to use various methods, to practice across interdisciplinary boundaries, to view a handicap as part of a total set of systems, to understand that these systems are interrelated, and allows practitioners to be flexible, and to use ingenuity (Auerswald, 1970; Cantrell, 1974; Kauffman, 1980).

Rhodes (1970) discusses several basic tenets of ecological theory that working with children in isolation from their environments is not likely to be successful, and that improvement in any part of the system can benefit the entire system. Therefore, the way to help a youngster is not necessarily to focus solely on the youngster, but instead to direct efforts to another part of the system.

It is clear that an ecological view of intervening with children requires working with not only the child, but the systems and individuals surrounding the child. This includes a major emphasis on working with the child's family and developing an understanding of the critical role that families can play in changing the behaviors of troubled youngsters. Bronfenbrenner (1977) recognizes the major part that families play in providing children with the elements of support and structure necessary for growth and development. From an

ecological perspective it is important for professionals, especially teachers, to realize that families and the home setting comprise a powerful microsystem which can impact on a youngster's overall functioning.

Models of Parent Involvement

According to Halvorsen (1982), there are three models of parent involvement: the parent as teacher model; the mixed model; and the parent as parent trainer model.

The parent as teacher model was designed to counter the lack of generalization and maintenance of skills acquired by seriously developmentally delayed and at risk youngsters. Parents are trained in this model both individually and in small groups to use behavior management techniques to assist their youngsters in learning and maintaining self-care, communication, and prevocational skills (Baldwin, Fredericks & Brodsky, 1973; Baker & Heifetz, 1976). One real problem with model is that it often reflects professional concerns and professional agenda as opposed to parental concerns which involve day to day survival issues. Also problematic is the amount of professional time needed to train parent, both in small groups and individually at home. As Halvorsen (1982) points out "it is questionable to assume that the majority

of teachers of primary or secondary handicapped students view parent training or home visits as part of their role" (p. 224). Therefore, in order to be successful, this type of model requires funds to make professional time available. Another absolute requisite of this model would be those components of the program designed specifically to counter what Lynch (1981) termed "barriers to participation" which might include communication. language and cultural differences, transportation, child care, etc.

In the second model of parent involvement, the mixed model, the emphasis is on designing programs that reflect the individual family's stated needs, as opposed to the professional agenda. Needs Assessment in this model becomes the cornerstone for identifying the services in the community a family might require, and for developing strategies for family access to those services (Brewer & Kakalik, 1979; Bricker & Casuso, 1979). One example of this type of assessment involves the use of the "ecological inventory" (Falvey, Brown, Lyon, Baumgart & Schroeder, 1980), which has been demonstrated as an effective assessment tool, yet one which is very costly in terms of individual professional time. Another area of great concern in this model is the lack of evaluative data, i.e,

the use of formative and ideographic data to evaluate the degree of project success with regard to the stated objectives of the project.

In the latter model, parents as trainers of other parents, emphasis is placed on the effectiveness of parent-parent communication as more meaningful than parent-professional communication regarding issues related to their handicapped youngsters. In the literature, this model was used effectively to train 1500 parents by Hall, Grinstead, Collier and Hall (1980) who termed the model "turnkey trainers of other parents." This model reaches out to parents to develop new parent resources in the community and then attempts to extend these and other parent organizations. However, according to Halvorsen (1982) this model has a serious drawback in its ability to recruit parents. "The impracticality of recruiting unpaid parent volunteers for a turnkey trainers program may outweigh its advantages" (p. 241).

Parents and Community Together (PACT) is a combination of the parent as teacher model, the mixed model, and the trainer of trainers model which attempts to address the diverse needs of an urban multi-ethnic, multi-lingual parent population in San Francisco. This program attempts to keep parents

interested in school involvement by providing a needs assessment and by using existing community resources. The program coordinators stress that one cannot assume that a single uniform program of parent involvement will meet the needs of all parents of handicapped youngsters. Therefore, the needs assessment must seek to determine such elements as parent's knowledge level, skills, time constraints, previous experience, interests, and work schedule. In order to keep parents interested, support groups must be formed that are tailored to meet diverse needs. PACT also involves community agencies and makes use of school sites which serve as the focal point for outreach activities. Although PACT addresses the problems faced by parents of severely handicapped youngsters, this model would appear to also be helpful to parents of the moderately and mildly handicapped.

Problems in Parent Training

Despite the apparent success of the approach, the practice of utilizing parents as change agents has some inherent problems relevant to the willingness of parents to cooperate in training efforts. According to Lynch (1981), barriers to parent participation included communication problems, transportation problems, child care problems, lack of time, lack of

understanding the system, feelings of inferiority and language or cultural differences (p. 30).

Parents have often been resistant to training (Sajwaj, 1973; Salzinger, Feldman, & Portnoy, 1970), reluctant to follow programmatic instructions (Fedoravicius, 1973; Rose, 1974; Salzinger et al., 1970; Zeilberger et al., 1968), slow in finishing assignments (Patterson & Reid, 1970; Ried & Hendriks, 1973). Furthermore, improvements in the target child's behavior have not always been sufficiently reinforcing to motivate the parent to support and maintain behavior change (Patterson et al., 1969; Patterson, 1971; Wahler, 1976). That is, once a child's behavior has changed as a result of the systematic application of operant techniques by the parents, it does not necessarily follow that the parents will then attend to (be reinforced by) the child's appropriate behavior as they once attended to the child's inappropriate behavior. All of these elements have been considered to be problems of parental motivation.

Wahler (1976) also suggests that high attrition rates from parent training programs are indicative of a problem in parent motivation. On this basis, he challenges the commonly held assumption that improvements in a child's behavior will

result in parental support and maintenance of the contingencies whic contributed to these improvements, particularly in the case of single parents. That is to say, for many parents improvement in their youngster's behavior may be reinforcing all at once and they become the highly motivated parents, or for other parents, the improvement is not reinforcing and must become reinforcing or parents will quickly withdraw (Greer & Dorow, 1976) from the program. In order for a child's behavioral improvements to become reinforcing for parents, reinforcement must be taught, i.e. it must be conditioned using positive strategies.

The notion of the reinforcement value of a child's behavior for a parent is an important one when considering the issue of generalization of training. Generalization as a research issue in parent training has been considered by Forehand and Atkeson (1977) and Kelly, Embry and Baer (1979). It has been demonstrated in the literature that the number of common stimuli between tasks or settings determines the occurrence and degree of probable generalization (Stokes & Baer, 1977). However, Greer and Dorow (Note 1) posit that it is not only the commonality of stimuli but also the degree of reinforcement value held for common stimuli which facilitates

generalization, a position somewhat similar to Staat's (1974) two-factor, three-function theory. In this theory, Staat proposes that a discriminative stimulus can acquire reinforcement value and in addition serve as a reinforcer after it has had a discriminative function. Hence, it would follow that increasing the reinforcement value of a child for a parent would serve to strengthen the stimulus control of the parent and thereby increase the probability of generalization across time, settings, behaviors, and perhaps even other people. Likewise, it would follow that increasing the reinforcement value of a parent for a child would serve to strengthen the stimulus control of the child and thereby increase both the probability of generalization and the possibility of greater parental motivation. Polirstok and Greer's (1977) study supports the notion that changing the reinforcement value of a child for an adult or an adult for a child might result in greater stimulus control for either the adult or the child.

Conclusion

Parents lack skills and coping behaviors necessary for dealing effectively with their handicapped children. Therefore, there is a need to train teachers and other professionals

in an ecological approach to parent intervention and training, utilizing both at home and small group training methodology. According to Halvorsen (1982) there are three models of parent involvement which should be considered: the parent as teacher model; the mixed model; and the parent as trainer of other parents model. Crucial to the meaningfulness of training in all three models is the use of a comprehensive needs assessment which would reflect the training priorities of parents as opposed to those of professionals. Teachers can significantly impact on parents and children in the community when training employs a "trainer of trainers" model. However, most factors regarding teacher time and parent motivation are crucial to the success of the model.

The literature demonstrates that parents can be successfully trained to change maladaptive behaviors of their youngsters. They can be used as agents to foster maintenance and generalization of skills acquired in school, vis a vis the use of the "parent as teacher" model. Parent training has been successful across a broad range of handicapping conditions (at risk infants) toddlers, mental retardation, autism, emotional disturbances and hearing impairments) and presenting problems which include speech and language deficits/delays, asthmatic

attacks, psychogenic seizures, insomnia, oppositional behaviors, etc.

Overall, the literature indicates that a collaborative effort by individuals in the home, school, and community can effect the best possible gains for handicapped youngsters.

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